

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 45

RESOLUTION CHAPTER 92

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 45—Relative to the Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Highway.

[Filed with Secretary of State August 29, 2013.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL’S DIGEST

SCR 45, Wolk. Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Highway.

This measure would designate the portion of Interstate 80 between Midway Road and the State Route 12 East interchange in the County of Solano as the Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Highway to honor the Tuskegee Airmen and the contributions they made during World War II. The measure would request the Department of Transportation to determine the cost for appropriate signs showing this special designation and, upon receiving donations from nonstate sources covering that cost, to erect those signs.

WHEREAS, Despite adversity and limited opportunities, African Americans have played a significant role in United States military history over the past 300 years. They were denied military leadership roles and skilled training because many people believed they lacked the qualifications for combat duty; and

WHEREAS, Before 1940, African Americans were barred from flying for the United States military, but civil rights organizations and the black press exerted pressure that resulted in what became known as the “Tuskegee Experiment”; and

WHEREAS, On January 16, 1941, the War Department announced the formation of the 99th Pursuit Squadron, the first African American flying unit in the United States Army Air Corps, that trained at the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama, and which became known as the “Lonely Eagles,” who fought in the Mediterranean and European Theaters; and

WHEREAS, For every African American pilot there were 10 other African Americans, including navigators, bombardiers, maintenance and support staff, instructors, and all the personnel who keep airplanes in the air; and

WHEREAS, On March 7, 1942, the first class of African American pilots at Tuskegee Army Airfield, 42-C, completed advanced pilot training. There were only five who completed the training: Captain Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. and 2nd Lieutenants Mac Ross, Lemuel R. Custis, Charles H. DeBow, Jr., and George S. Roberts. Captain Davis was assigned to the base, and the other four became the first African American flying officers in the 99th Pursuit Squadron; and

WHEREAS, The squadron was quickly dubbed the “Tuskegee Airmen” and redesignated the 99th Fighter Squadron on May 15, 1942, and assigned

to the 332nd Fighter Group, for which they later served as a bomber escort group that famously lost very few bombers to enemy fighters. The 332nd Fighter Group was later expanded to include the 99th, 100th, 301st, and 302nd Fighter Squadrons; and

WHEREAS, In June 1943, the Tuskegee Airmen entered into combat over North Africa. The Tuskegee Airmen exemplified courage, skill, and dedication in combat. They flew P-39-, P-40-, P-47- and P-51-type single-seat fighter aircraft on more than 15,000 sorties, completing over 1,500 missions during the war; and

WHEREAS, On July 2, 1943, Lieutenant Charles B. Hall scored the 99th Fighter Squadron's first aerial victory. Never before had an African American fighter pilot in the United States Armed Forces shot down an enemy aircraft; and

WHEREAS, The new mission of the 332nd Fighter Group, under the command of Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., was to escort heavy bombers of the 15th Air Force on raids against strategic enemy targets in southern and central Europe; and

WHEREAS, During July 1944, the Tuskegee Airmen downed 36 enemy aircraft, the most they ever scored in a single month, and had begun flying the P-51 Mustang, which was faster and more maneuverable than the previous types of fighter aircraft that the group had flown from their base at Ramitelli Airfield in Italy; and

WHEREAS, During World War II, 72 Tuskegee Airmen shot down a total of 112 enemy aircraft, including the first German jet fighters. The Tuskegee Airmen proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that African Americans were capable of flying the best of the Allied fighters to victory against the best of the enemy fighters. They earned an indelible place in the history of air combat and in the history of their country and of the world; and

WHEREAS, On May 11, 1945, three days after Germany surrendered, the 332nd Fighter Group assembled for a ceremony in which Major General Nathan F. Twining, commander of the 15th Air Force, presented various honors, including the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal, and the Bronze Star, to various members of the 332nd Fighter Group; and

WHEREAS, The Tuskegee Airmen destroyed over 1,000 enemy aircraft, received more than 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses, and lost so few Allied bomber aircraft to enemy fighters when flying escort missions that they earned the title "Red Tail Angels" from the bomber crews who would specifically request the 332nd Fighter Group as their escort; and

WHEREAS, On November 6, 1998, President Clinton approved Public Law 105-355, which established the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site at Moton Field in Tuskegee, Alabama, to commemorate and interpret the heroic actions of the Tuskegee Airmen during World War II. The site contains a museum and interpretive programs at the historic complex at Moton Field as well as a national center based on a public-private partnership; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly thereof concurring, That the Legislature hereby designates that portion of Interstate 80 between Midway Road and the State Route 12 East interchange in the County of Solano as the Tuskegee Airmen Memorial Highway to honor the Tuskegee Airmen and the contributions they made during World War II; and be it further

Resolved, That the Department of Transportation is requested to determine the cost of erecting appropriate signs, consistent with the signing requirements for the state highway system, showing this special designation and, upon receiving donations from nonstate sources covering that cost, to erect those signs; and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of this resolution to the Director of Transportation and to the author for appropriate distribution.